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## Castles in the Air: Thoreau's Theory of Mind

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Bard

Castles in the Air: Henry David Thoreau's Theory of Mind

Senior Project submitted to  
The Division of Languages & Literature  
of Bard College

by

H.D. Trask

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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## Introduction

The famous Burnt Lands sequence of “Ktaadn,” one of the three narratives that comprise Thoreau’s posthumously published collection, *The Maine Woods*, acquaints the reader with a catastrophic vision of nature that is antithetical to Thoreau’s experiences within the pastoral setting of Walden Pond. Writers such as Sherman Paul have insisted that *Walden* is Thoreau’s vision of an individual’s symbiotic relation with Nature; In *Walden*, Thoreau asserts, “We can never have enough of Nature” (*Walden* 575), and “I think that we may safely trust ourselves a great deal more than we do...Nature is as well adapted to our weakness as to our strength” (331). Paul argues that Thoreau’s writings on his several trips to the Maine woods indicate an awareness of the Nature he experienced at Walden Pond: mainly, “his life at the pond and in Concord pastures was far from wild” “...and though he always maintained that the health of civilization needed the tonic of the wild, his experience taught him that the pastoral landscape was the best setting for human life” (Paul 104).

It is certain that in Thoreau’s expedition to the Maine woods, seen especially in his vision of the Burnt Lands in “Ktaadn”, he confronted a example of potent, unadulterated Nature; for “there was there felt the presence of a force not bound to be kind to man” (*The Maine Woods* 645). His vision here cannot give people the spiritual guidance that the “pastoral” setting of Walden Pond might. Even the harsher scenes of the pastoral setting, which may leave us defeated and reveal to us our own limitations, may be utilized by the mind to structure some sort of teaching, some sense of value that the individual might walk away with.

Paul describes the pastoral as an integral value of American Transcendental thought. In the pastoral vision of Nature one may integrate oneself into the cycles and movements of the

natural world, allowing the benign examples of the flora and fauna to instruct the self in matters of spiritual truth. A quote that comes to mind is Emerson's, who says that the "moral influence of nature upon every individual is that amount of truth which it illustrates to him" (*Nature* 59). In other words, the individual will gain whatever his mind may supply him with. The spiritual truths are tapped into, for both Emerson and Thoreau, through the intellectual faculties. Paul's sentiment is certainly a valid interpretation of Transcendentalism, upholding that Thoreau had gleaned the humanity of the pastoral in his trips to the Maine woods.

I wish, however, to reconsider this example of Maine *wildness* which Paul takes up. It is not that I disagree with Paul's argument, but I wish to reconsider the source of this particular claim, from *The Maine Woods*, in order to acquaint the present reader with a thematic cornerstone in Thoreau's writings. This is Thoreau's interest in human consciousness, particularly in its connection to the natural world. His body of work, especially *Walden*, contains a subtle yet wholly present *theory of the mind*. Thoreau is no clinical physician, nor scientist; his autodidactic theory is derived from his interest in language and its attachment to conscious experience. This passage from "Ktaadn" encapsulates a critical relation between subject and object. In the passage we witness Thoreau come to terms with a truth of human cognition, approaching the arduous question, 'from whence came our thoughts?' In the passage that I shall quote at length shortly, I ask the reader to keep in mind Thoreau's understanding of Nature as, first and foremost, a spiritual guide. The question to be asked is not whether or not Thoreau feels outside of this vision of Nature, but rather *why* is it that he, and all people, must indefinitely feel outside of, alien to, this particular scene.

The passage is here quoted at length:

...This was that Earth of which we have heard, made out of Chaos and Old Night. Here was no man's garden, but the unhandselled globe. It was not lawn, nor pasture, nor mead, nor woodland, nor lea, nor arable, nor waste-land. It was the fresh and natural surface of the planet Earth, as it was made for ever and ever, — to be the dwelling of man, we say, — so Nature made it, and man may use it if he can. Man was not to be associated with it. It was Matter, vast, terrific, — not his Mother Earth that we have heard of, not for him to tread on, or be buried in, — no, it were being too familiar even to let his bones lie there, — the home, this, of Necessity and Fate. There was there felt the presence of a force not bound to be kind to man. It was a place for heathenism and superstitious rites, — to be inhabited by men nearer of kin to the rocks and to wild animals than we. We walked over it with a certain awe, stopping, from time to time, to pick the blueberries which grew there, and had a smart and spicy taste. Perchance where *our* wild pines stand, and leaves lie on their forest floor, in Concord, there were once reapers, and husbandmen planted grain; but here not even the surface had been scarred by man, but it was a specimen of what God saw fit to make this world. (*The Maine Woods* 645-6)

Critics have focussed on two key issues in this passage. First, that these “Burnt Lands” are harsh to Man’s presence, as he “was not to be associated with it.” Here, Thoreau distinguishes the “natural” place of man on this earth from his attempt to find dwelling in a scene of Nature such as here described. Thoreau understands the “natural” place of man as amongst people, at least still mentally attached to some sense of the Human. A good example of his sentiment towards



this dialectic, namely that concerning the Human vs. the Natural, is in *Walden*, when revealing his reservations towards the primitive Canadian lumberman, Therien, in whom he deduces that “the animal man chiefly was developed” (*Walden* 439). Though the lumberman is a point of interest for Thoreau, admitting that “he [Therien] suggested...there might be genius in the lowest grades of life,” Thoreau ultimately maintains hesitancy towards “his thinking” that is “so primitive and immersed in animal life.” By immersing himself too fully into Nature, Thoreau would be obliged to sacrifice his intellectual faculties, which are necessary for him to realize the value of wildness. In short, Thoreau’s confrontations with wildness must not sacrifice his sense of self: he yokes his experience in nature to a decidedly intellectual realm, by which he may garner a conscious awareness of himself and the world he lives in. If he surrenders to this wildness in himself, the “animal man,” he thus sacrifices his sense of individuality, which he understands as axiomatic to preserving his conscious awareness of the world. This point shall be elaborated on in the coming paragraphs.

The second point which is rather noticeable is the language Thoreau consciously wields, in order to establish the scene’s vivid, divine imagery: “made out of Chaos and Old Night,” “the home...of Necessity and Fate,” and “a specimen of what God saw fit to make this world.” This imagery of the Divine evokes, in a more ancient Greek sense, a realm inhabited by the natural forces and primal concepts as well as, in a Judeo-Christian sense of creation, an actual creation of God; but unlike the Judeo-Christian sense of God, Thoreau’s vision emphasizes the hostility of such creation. This is a vision of Nature wholly separate from the Human. Divinity here is distinctly pagan; this is an archaic imagery that acknowledges the primal side of Nature as its supreme Deity, as this land was “to be inhabited by men nearer of kin to the rocks and to wild

animals than we.” It is with this last point especially that I may springboard into a reconsideration of this oft-quoted passage.

The fact that this realm of Nature is to be inhabited by men of a different age, who had lived “nearer” to the earth than we, speaks to a particular condition of modern civilization. The proximity between this old race of Man and Nature implies that this race had a more literal understanding of the world, where matter and divinity were one. Our experience was comprised of sheer matter, our selves more integrated into the order of Nature than now. For Thoreau, we cannot return to this union with Nature, as we have now progressed out of it, now safely in the hands of modern civilization. We have created points of inhabitation for ourselves, several divergent manifestations of “man’s garden.” No part of this wilderness “had been scarred by man,” no piece altered or arranged to better suit his life, to better construct his dwelling. Once man has constructed a dwelling for himself, he is no longer able to live and revere chaos. He has pseudo-evolutionarily passed into an age of man marked by contemplation. He no longer lives amongst chaos, but lives amongst an subjectively-constructed ordering of this chaos. Only when chaos is appropriated to this limited and narrow “ordering” may he contemplate the chaos; and in contemplating the chaos within the subjective frame of his imagination, he thus contemplates his self: the creator of this idea of order.

A perfect example of this ordering of chaos is in the creative process of art, such as with the Romantic notion of the Sublime. Thoreau himself was born into the latter-end of Romantic thought, and this philosophic theme certainly appears to have been an object of intellectual concern for Thoreau. This is easily contained in the setting all of his book’s narratives fall into; i.e. Nature. Ronald Wesley Hoag connects Edmund Burke, who claims that obscurity is a

requisite for the Sublime, with the scene of the Burnt Lands, whose particularities Thoreau cannot distinguish (Hoag 34). When the Sublime is contained in art, then, we are able to approach it; the Sublime is intimated in art, not because the painting itself is obscure, but in that it is imbued with the *feeling* of sublimity. The artist's mind and the art work itself mediate the viewer's understanding of sublimity. But when put into form, such as a painting, we may contemplate the Sublime: the artwork is an ordering of the sublime, which immediately, in Burke's understanding of it, takes away its essence, which is sublimity. The scene at the Burnt Lands, like a painting, mediates the reader's understanding of the Sublime; but there is no question as to the feeling the scene elicits in Thoreau. Being that the Burnt Lands are, indeed, "no man's garden," we must consider its "order" as *not being order at all* (in the terms of human understanding). The objects of this scene were never arranged nor constructed by man,—never arranged into a "garden"—, but were the result of a primordial yet eternal process of Earth's creation. This side of nature is harsh to man because it does not allow man to comprehend it, its sheer materiality being averse to any substance; that is, it destroys any projection of symbolic meaning that one might seek out within the space of its ineffable wildness. To Thoreau, it is sheer chaos, without the particularities to discriminate its symbolic capacities.

It is this inherent denial of symbolic meaning that makes the Burnt Lands so alien to the pastoral. The material chaos that constitutes it is so forcefully present that there is no order that man can place upon it. In his essay, "Building Dwelling Thinking," Martin Heidegger synthesizes a viable allegorical model to convey an understanding of people and their relation to what he calls "space." There is a distinction between space and people which inhabit, or "dwell,"

within a space: a person may only dwell in space through locations in that space, which are humanly constructed. “Spaces,” Heidegger goes on to say,

open up by the fact that they are let into the dwelling of man. To say that mortals *are* is to say that *in dwelling* they persist through spaces by virtue of their stay among things and locations. And only because mortals pervade, persist through, spaces by their very nature are they able to go through spaces. But in going through spaces we do not give up our standing in them. Rather, we always go through spaces in such a way that we already experience them by staying constantly with near and remote locations and things. (Heidegger 154-5)

People, for Heidegger, can only dwell within space by the significance of buildings, which comprise “locations.” Locations establish our means of inhabiting a space. Heidegger uses examples of architecture, particularly the bridge, which thus establish the concept of location, by “gathering” the space around it, allowing us to understand this otherwise alien “space” as the landscape,—the location; in Heidegger’s example, this conversion of space into location is only allowed in the bridge’s erection, in man-made construction. “The bridge *gathers* the earth as landscape around the stream. Thus it guides and attends the stream through the meadows” (150). The bridge creates location, unifying the occupied space as location. But this process of unification is simultaneously a process of discrimination. It creates the distinction between the separate parts of this constructed landscape such as “stream,” “meadow,” “sky,” and the two pieces of land the bridge serves to connect.

This idea of *gathering* is an architectural example of the mind’s understanding of “space.” People are only able to orient themselves within space by their idea of location within

that space. Location does not contain the entirety of the “space” dwelt in, but it is a human construction and our only approximate means of understanding the space in which we dwell. Heidegger’s concept of “location” links itself to Thoreau’s notion of “man’s garden”; we must not, however, think of this garden as being constituted by the construction of literal architecture within “space.” “Mother Earth,” man’s symbolic representation of Nature, is a construction of equal magnitude to the impinging materiality of architecture. It is a projected understanding of the earth as a nurturing force that provides for humanity, never against him, instructing him of his limits. The practicality of this idea of “building” in the physical sense lies in its connection to the mind’s tendency to “build” or understand the space occupied by the individual. When confronted with something as physical as architecture, one is able to better understand the extent to which the mind depends on its own constructions, its ability to project a sense of location upon the greater whole of “space.” The mind will search for such unity, and will construct a model to represent a vision of “space.” In short, the mind must think in unified form in order to understand space; but this understanding is by approximation: the mind’s construction of form must always be understood as merely a *model*, an example of understood space, which can be dissolved by the mind’s return to the very space which primarily informed the construction of it’s (the mind’s) “location.”

And if Heidegger’s definition of location lends itself to Thoreau’s notion of “man’s garden,” “space” must correspond to the “pure and natural surface of the earth, as it was made for ever and ever,” which Thoreau confronts on Mount Katahdin. The Burnt Lands are a pure expression of space, inhabited by Matter which the mind cannot separate from the whole so as to construct any interpretation of order: the mind cannot discern nor create a sense of “location”

within this space. Hoag points to the Emersonian idea that “every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact” as a key to understanding the contrast between the Burnt Lands and Walden Pond. Given that the land is not touched by man, the mountain itself is “unvitiated matter”; “paradoxically, it is precisely because the matter atop Katahdin is so intense and so pure that it is, therefore, so perfectly spiritual” (Hoag 38). Unlike in Emerson’s equation from *Nature*, however, the Burnt Lands sequence does not connote any “fact” nor any “symbol”: it is sheer expression of natural matter, undifferentiated, and wholly imbued in spirit. The natural and spiritual are here the same phenomenon. The unity between the spiritual and natural vision of this Matter causes Thoreau to feel drawn into and integrated into the potent expression of Nature that surrounds him, postulating his own body’s dissolution into this Nature saturated in Spirit:

I stand in awe of my body, this matter to which I am bound has become so strange to me. I fear not spirits, ghosts, of which I am one, — *that* my body might, — but I fear bodies, I tremble to meet them. What is this Titan that has possession of me? Talk of mysteries! — Think of our life in nature, — daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it, — rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! The *solid* earth! the *actual* world! the *common sense*! *Contact! Contact! Who* are we? *where* are we? (*The Maine Woods* 646)

The potency of spirit causes Thoreau to feel the boundary separating himself from Nature dissolve, so well defined by the corporeal frame. He feels his frame break down, enabling a spiritual connection with this pure Nature; yet in this out-of-body experience, Thoreau loses possession of his self, which now is in the grasp of some “Titan.” His very presence in the Burnt Lands leads to a dualistic separation. It is the “Contact” of his own corporeal self and this pure

Matter, “the *solid* earth! the *actual* world!,” that causes him to question his location and identity. “The *common sense*!,” the objective world that ever alludes us deteriorates his ordered sense of location within space, because he is connected back to this example of pure “space.” “Location,” though constructed by the intellectual faculties to gain better understanding of space, can also become a trap, deluding the mind of the true source of reality, of “space,” that primarily influenced this mental action...

By this autodidactic instruction Thoreau received in his descent of Mount Katahdin, and which his chronicling of the event lends to us as instruction, I feel now is the important time to introduce the present work. By my interpretation the instruction is specifically that the individual mind is inextricably an entity unto itself: it is forever separate from the “common sense.” And though this potent example of Nature, “made of Chaos and Old Night,” that Thoreau envisions in the Burnt Lands is, for him, the quintessence of unadulterated Nature, it is the same Nature that covers all the rest of the world. Human civilization has erected its structures and made its mark over the world, creating Heideggerian “locations”: cities, ideologies, religions, sciences, etc. Human civilization has created for itself myriad lens through which it may approach the world and its “truth”; yet, still what remains under this surface of human experience is the chimeric manifestation of pure and potent Nature as he caught a glimpse of at the Burnt Lands.

“Perchance where *our* wild pines stand, and leaves lie on their forest floor, in Concord, there were once reapers, and husbandmen planted grain”; this last part of the passage quoted at the beginning speaks to the pines of Concord, which were arranged and plotted by the minds of men. The Nature that Thoreau believed himself to have studied so succinctly at Walden Pond, was not

the pure manifestation of Nature that was revealed to him at the Burnt Lands. We must not, however, allow this example at the Burnt Lands dismiss his experience in *Walden*. On the contrary, this scene from “Ktaadn” (which is an account of a trip he took to the Maine Woods while living at Walden Pond between 1845-’47) must inform our understanding of *Walden*: the Burnt Lands suggest to Thoreau the capacity of our understanding and the impressionability of a human mind. This is a psychological concern for Thoreau, and it is one that is at the heart of *Walden*. The book is a study of the mind, an assessment of human potential in the face of natural limitation.

What is most crucial for our understanding the Burnt Lands sequence in “Ktaadn” is that Thoreau not only feels alien to this potency of Nature; but, rather, that he feels alien to it because it cannot be contemplated by the human mind. The Burnt Lands represents a saturation of wholly natural form, into which Thoreau cannot place himself and return again to a conscious state of mind. He may enter only to never return. But what is important is that he lets the scene remain as chaos: he continues his descent down the mountain and returns home to Concord. In other words, he champions his humanity over an attempt to synthesize himself into Nature. He must use Nature as a medium by which he can explore the constituencies of his self; being that he may only contemplate Nature in a subjectively-constructed form,—his idea of Nature is informed by his self. Only by returning to the pure realm of “Space,” which is in effect the greater whole of Nature, may he understand himself through the dissolution of his “location,” i.e. his *idea* of Nature. He must reacquaint himself with the impermeable chaos that the world is, in order to move beyond the limitations of his own conception. But he still may not dwell in space; Nature can never be his permanent abode.



It is in this dialogue between chaos and order that Thoreau's theory of mind is built upon. For this present work, we must understand this encounter with pure Nature at the Burnt Lands as revealing a truth of the human mind: we can only understand our experiences, on an intellectual level, with order. The mind's ability to order is one of the greatest powers of the human mind; in fact, it is so great a power that we must be ever cautious of its control over us. While acknowledging the mind's constructive power, Thoreau proposes that we must simultaneously engage chaos (that which is real and outside of our order) if we are to establish in ourselves a conscious relation to the world.

*Walden* encapsulates Thoreau's dual stance towards the mind's powers more succinctly than his other works, and it shall be the main concern of the following pages. With this explication of the Burnt Lands sequence in mind, we may now discuss the two major structures of *Walden* in which Thoreau's theory of mind is framed. The first chapter shall discuss his notion of experimentation; the second shall discuss his sentiments towards reading. The first chapter is focused mainly on the correspondence between the physical and mental realms of human experience, honing in specifically on the all-too human tendency to fall into habit. Thoreau's concern for habit reveals his concern for the subtle connection between our physical experience and how it informs our impressionable mind. Experimentation, then, is Thoreau's remedy to habit. The second chapter is concerned mainly with the relation between a text and its reader, attempting to bring attention to Thoreau's long passages on the importance of reading. It is in this dialogue between the text and its reader that mirrors an ideal relation that one should have to the physical world. Thoreau establishes an ethics around reading; that is, he prescribes a method

of “true reading,” which manifests itself in both the experience of reading and the experience of life. And it is with this that we shall now turn to the body of the argument.



## Chapter I

In his crepuscular movement between the town of Concord and his cabin on Walden Pond, Thoreau, the avid walker, describes the blessed moment of becoming lost from a habitually-worn “usual course.” It is by this course that we go “unconsciously steering like pilots by certain well known beacons and headlands.” He states that “not till we are completely lost, or turned around,— for a man needs only to be turned around once with his eyes shut in this world to be lost, — do we appreciate the vastness and strangeness of Nature.” Becoming lost is, for Thoreau, a moment of epiphany that causes us to “realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations” (*Walden* 459); in other words, it is only when we are lost from our path that we can begin to orient not only ourselves, but our own understanding of the world, “the infinite extent of our relations.” It is in this moment that one becomes “awake.”

Thoreau’s project in *Walden* addresses this idea of becoming lost; his sense of this loss, however, must be better scrutinized before we go any further. Utilizing the image of the path, the “usual course,” between his cabin and the town of Concord, Thoreau creates for us a physical analogy to the more abstracted idea of connecting points A and B together: A being his cabin, B being the town of Concord. The “usual course” that his feet’s soles have worn from A to B, represents a single method of connecting the two points together. When traveling at night, he loses his sense of this habitually-worn path, resulting in his understanding that he has left it behind. But in the moment he realizes himself to be lost, he simultaneously reverts to his own senses as a means of orienting himself: he reinstates a conscious stance towards the world, whereby he and, more importantly, his senses, become “awake.”

Thoreau's formulation of finding/losing himself acquaints us with a central paradox that persists throughout the whole of his writings, though it is especially central to *Walden*: the process of becoming lost reacquaints him with his sense of self. It is in this process that he regains a pure relation to his self, untethered to the yoke of habit, which denies him a truly conscious relation to his experience of the present moment. Habit must be understood quite liberally, as overall unconscious conduct. This moment of becoming lost from his path identifies the path as being a past record of the self. One will continue along one's path as it is imagined before him. But in following the imagined route of the path, one continues along a course determined by some preconceived notion of progress, which originally sent him down his path. If one continues along the path one trudges unconsciously, lost to the present moment. This is why Thoreau's analogy of the path lends itself so well to the notion of habit, as a path is a worn course, whether trudged by one's past self or by another: both scenarios should be understood as identical, since both are alien to the "present" self. The past self can contradict the conscious efforts and movements of the "present" self. Thus in becoming lost, we gain awareness of ourselves, which alone connects us to the present moment.

Thoreau's paradox of the self realizing itself is central to the present reading of *Walden*. Harold Kaplan identifies Thoreau's acceptance of "the presence of such contradictions" to establish a "dominant tone of his writing...of a man in an enthusiastic mood, but one educated beyond it and, furthermore, educated beyond his own skepticism, to another stage of sober belief" (Kaplan 97). Thoreau's susceptibility to become lost foreshadows his ability to find his way again. His enthusiasm centers around how his consciousness is actuated in the moment he finds himself to be lost. He takes on a mature stance, understanding that a path through the

woods worn down by the habit of his movements will likely lead him astray from his own conscious effort, though it may safely see him home. The “stage of sober belief” that Kaplan claims Thoreau to have arrived at is a belief in the self’s ability to find its own way; it is “sober” because he has realized he is left alone to himself. In realizing he is lost, he realizes that the self must persist and endure the unpaved wilderness by its own faculties. Becoming lost allows Thoreau to experiment within his constructed boundaries of consciousness. The point of the paradox is that he actually *finds* himself in becoming lost. What he is lost from is an old-fashioned conduct of life, by which he had once understood experience. But this reference to experience, because formulated in the past, inevitably will falter in light of the present. But Thoreau can only truly learn the tenuous position of his state of consciousness in becoming lost: in doing so he acclimates himself to the present. This state is at the forefront of his idea of experimentation.

Thoreau’s notion of becoming lost is tied to his desire to reinvigorate a conscious relation with his environment. The other side of this conscious relation is the tendency of our actions to so effortlessly become habits. William James argues that the practical affects of habit may be manifested in two ways: “first, habit simplifies our movements, makes them accurate, and diminishes fatigue” and “[s]econdly, *habit diminishes the conscious attention with which our acts are performed*” (James 128, 129). Habit, thus, has a practical aspect of efficiency; yet with this efficiency reveals the other, more delusive aspect of habit: unconscious action. James goes on to say that “habits are due to pathways through the nerve-centres,” based on the “plasticity” of our physiological experience (127). Plasticity, as James defines it, is “the possession of a

structure weak enough to yield to an influence, but strong enough not to yield all at once”; thus, “the phenomena of habit in living beings are due to the plasticity of the organic materials of which their bodies are composed” (126). The plasticity of our frames allows for an specific action, which is “nothing but *concentrated* discharges in the nerve-centres,” to be repeated more facilely. These pathways through the nerve-centres are literally worn in through repetition of an action, making the accomplishment of this action to be much more efficient and fluid.

These definitions of habit serve to center our understanding of Thoreau’s project. Much of the time habits cause us to accomplish tasks facilely: repeating actions will deepen the neural passageways that are discharged according to the action. Such is the case with Thoreau and the habitual path he walks between his cabin and Concord. In this allegorical instance, Thoreau deepens the trodden ground of the earth; this is thus mirrored in the neural pathways of the brain, which are deepened with the repeated frequency of treading this path through the woods. Yet with this efficiency of action, there is also an aspect of habit that is detrimental to our nervous-system and overall sensory experience, which Thoreau is particularly concerned with. It is the senses which allow us to be conscious of our environment; but when a particular action is repeated, the nerve-centres associated with that action are stimulated less intensely, given that the neural pathways are made deeper with every repetition of this action: and with repetition comes impression, which is the mark of habit. This may lead to our mastery in a specific task, such as a piano player experiences with a daily calisthenic regiment of ascending and descending scales in order to play difficult pieces with agility. Yet, in the everyday experience of life, habit can have a detrimental effect upon our conscious relation to the world. We are no longer able to “realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations.” Habit, as understood by Thoreau in regards

to the path between his cabin and Concord, is related to vision; he becomes lost to his habitual path because his vision, which he has depended on to traverse the narrow course of the path, is now sent into obscurity by the nighttime. His ability to complete this habitual action is enabled by a so-called normality of outside factors. But when there is an abnormality, such as an absence of light, he is deterred from his habitual action. He must create a new action, or, in this particular case, he must find another way back to his cabin.

It is indicative of paths through the woods that they deliver the traveller to zones of human habitation,—to society of one form or another. The path mentioned above connects Thoreau's cabin to the town of Concord, the path itself being a mark of the human serpent, to use James' words. In *Walden's* "Conclusion," Thoreau laments the path-bound character of the human condition: "The surface of the earth is soft and impressible by the feet of men; and so with the paths which the mind travels. How worn and dusty, then, must be the highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity!" (*Walden* 579). Wherever people are, and it is probable that it is there that people *have been*, there will also be paths. Thoreau uses paths in this sense not only to describe the result of feet trudging upon the soft earth, but in the individual's habitual travel along a path and its direct correspondence to the "path" impressed upon an individual's plastic consciousness. In the same paragraph he remarks "how easily and insensibly we fall into a particular route"; that is, how easy it is for people to fall into a particular habit, a route insensibly come upon through the repetition of our actions.

The habits of, let us say, a pianist, who consciously practices his scales repeatedly in order to economize his playing, are not the same as those habits we have unconsciously organized our lives around; these are much more of a threat to our conscious lives, because they



inevitably will mould our reception of experience. Yet if we do not address our habits at an early enough stage, we shall eventually be consumed by them, allowing them to mould, to define, our character. As James laments at the end of his chapter on habit, “Could the young but realize how soon they will become mere walking bundles of habits, they would give more heed to their conduct while in the plastic state” (James 138). This insinuated counsel to be self-conscious is daunting, perhaps overly puritanical in its obsession; its ultimate aim, however, is to ensure possession over the self; a self that is not consumed by the unconscious affect of habitude. James’ definitions of habit lend themselves well to Thoreau’s understanding of human psychology: that our actions literally imprint themselves in our daily conduct, whereby we are not only defined, but driven by them. “We are all sculptors and painters,” Thoreau declares, “and our material is our own flesh and blood.” Our sensuous experience converts and moulds our understanding; we are creators who are constantly being created.

Both Thoreau and James understand the individual as affected by their actions; but both understand that these actions may be rooted in some other psychological or material/external factor. This is not to say that our actions are logical, but rather, that our actions are conducted by some individual reason. Especially in the case of Thoreau, we must always look outwards from the self, to better understand, “Why do precisely these objects which we behold make a world?” (*Walden* 502). Our senses are connected to materiality, our minds tending to forms. Objects make a world, both in an objective sense, but also, in the terms of limited individual experience, in a subjective, psychological sense. Our world is created by the “objects we *behold*,” implying that our understanding of the world is determined by those objects we have

come into contact with. Thoreau's detestation of the the prejudicial town life in Concord is best exemplified in the image he depicts of farmers who have "inherited farms, houses, barns, cattle, and farming tools" which "are more easily acquired than got rid of" (326). These people have inherited the lives they are to live via the material objects handed down to them as determined by the family they were born into. The objects which made their world were set before them early to determine their occupation, and thus their being. Does this not appear to be the remnant of some feudal existence? This is why Thoreau champions the "tonic of wildness," saying, "our village life would stagnate if it were not for the unexplored forests and meadows which surround it" (575). In no way does he wish that the mind's connection to the external world be severed; it must be understood. By placing himself in nature he acknowledges the extent to which outside objects constitute our psychology. The effect of nature is the same as that of farming tools, in that both influence our understanding of the world.

Thoreau's self-awareness of the effect of external objects is very similar to the Philip Rieff's diagnosis of the Therapeutic. The Therapeutic is an emerging character type of the post-war era, who Rieff identifies as having revolted "against all doctrinal traditions urging the salvation of self through identification with the purposes of the community" (Rieff 208). Being a sociologist, Rieff is especially interested in making an assessment of culture, which he defines as "a system of moralizing demands...by which men are guided in their conduct so as to ensure a mutual security of contact" (8-9). Culture is a symbolic system, which is arranged to determine and conduct peoples' actions (Does this not sound like Heidegger's idea of "location"?). The Therapeutic, who no longer trusts these integrative measures of the community, denies the effect of "commitment therapies," which help "reintegrate the subject into the communal symbol

system” (57). The Therapeutic and Thoreau are, in some sense, quite similar; they have alienated themselves from their communities for the sake of upholding their own individuality. They both understand culture as being constituted by symbols that endanger our selfhood through the control over our conduct. Thoreau, who is weary of the habits his townspeople have grown accustomed to while living a “stagnant” life in Concord, is well aware of the sensitivity of the human mind. Yet, unlike the Therapeutic, Thoreau accepts the symbolic potential in all objects; The difference between them lies in how they idealize the self’s relation to these symbols.

The Therapeutic is put in fear by the effect of external objects, which have the symbolic potential to transplant his mind back into a communal symbol system, adherently championing his own individuality and society of objects so as to block out all others. In this way, the Therapeutic is plagued by a stagnancy of experience, which is conducted by a strict code of individual morality, leading to a cold and “ascetic” life, who still lives in the community (Rieff). He takes only the objects which symbolize the constitution of some “idealized self” (Beldoch 143), while neglecting the symbolic potential of the objects which may negate this idealized vision. Thoreau, in opposition, says that we “must constantly be refreshed by the sight of inexhaustible vigor, vast and titanic features, the sea-coast with its wrecks, the wilderness with its living and decaying trees, the thunder cloud, and the rain which lasts three weeks and produces freshets” (*Walden* 575). Thoreau must always place himself in environments which bring him outside of himself and his ordained ordering of the world. The Therapeutic must constantly find reasons to strengthen his own symbolic understanding of the world, denying the effects the wider scope of reality. Thoreau willingly allows reality to affect his symbolic ordering of the world, which he identifies with “the tonic of wildness.” This follows into Thoreau ability

to remain in a constant state of experimentation, testing the boundaries of his symbolic ordering by placing it in the realm of nature, in the real world.

Rieff's model is, in this case, so helpful in grounding our understanding of Thoreau's ability to experiment because of its derivation of the Psychoanalytic method. Freud was particularly interested in "instinctual demands"; these demands are constantly ungratified given the constituencies of the individual's place in society, and Psychoanalysis serves to mitigate the harsh denial of our instincts, as they dwell in the Unconscious. And Freud insists that Psychoanalysis must be used as a tool to mitigate the pain of the ungratified demands of the instinct. It "may be roughly described," he asserts, "as the "taming" of the instinct. That is to say, [instinct] is brought into harmony with the ego" (Freud 243). The instinctual demands constantly way upon the individual, and are manifested through both sensory experience and a deep seeded relation to the Unconscious. Freud great interest in the superego suggests his understanding of people as reactive. Because the instincts are integral to the human condition, we are constantly instigated by our reactions, many of which instinctually based. Freud's approach to the individual through Psychoanalysis, thus, instructs the individual how to look at these reactions and utilize them. The Therapeutic, in many ways, is not able to look at his reactions and instinctual demands. History's main lesson to him is "that all compelling symbols are dangerous, threatening the combined comfort of things as they are" (Rieff 207). The Therapeutic is a good student of Freud in that he denies the false salvation of what Rieff calls "commitment therapies" (i.e. giving oneself to a specific religion). Yet where he strays from Freud, and from Thoreau as well, is in his inability to confront his reactions to things. The Therapeutic depends upon "the confined *comfort* of things as they are"; the Therapeutic isolates himself from the

symbols that threaten his sense of order. Freud, on the other hand, requires that these are the symbols, the ones which elicits our instinctual drive, that we must confront, in order to “tame” them.

Freud does not want us to depart from symbolic order, which Rieff argues is integral to the structure of culture; instead, we must mitigate the inherent demands of a symbolic order. Psychoanalysis is a means of allowing us to separate our instincts from interfering with our interpretation of symbols: to allow them to be, but not to take hold of us. Neurosis is never eradicated, but merely dealt with in a more mature manner. Thoreau, then, is similar to the therapeutic in that he denies institutions and ideologies the possession of his mind; he does this in order to retain a conscious relation to things. Yet, Thoreau finds himself to be more in line with Freud’s thought than the Therapeutic because of his ability to experiment. He confronts life in order to dismantle the ordered “comfort” that his limited conception of the world supplies him with. He must place himself “in scenes which we are accustomed to call wild and dreary” in order to overcome a limited framework of his sensory understanding of the world (*Walden* 427). Like Freud, Thoreau is interested in confronting his reactions to objects, especially those that threaten his sense of order. This is then linked to his effort to keep himself “awake.” He does not deny the symbolic potential of objects, but experiments with his relation to them. As with his relation to the path, Thoreau must keep his habitual understanding of the world from taking over his sensory experience of the present moment. Our tendency to conduct our lives by the symbolic ordering of experience also threatens to negate our ability to awaken ourselves. The Therapeutic has been able to remove himself from the symbolically ordered path of culture, but still has not

been able to separate himself from the personal symbolism of his own path. He cannot experiment because he cannot have his sense of “comfort” threatened.

As learned from Thoreau’s experience at the Burnt Lands, the mind must think in form. The mind must identify some sort of symbolism within this constructed order to orient itself in the world. But sticking too ardently to one’s symbol system denies the retort of reality. The uncomfortable side of reality, that is, that part of reality that threatens one’s symbolic understanding of the world, will inevitably evade our symbolic ordering: the limited frame of human understanding can only approximate an idea of reality. The Therapeutic denies reality in that he denies any negative reaction in himself. Thoreau acknowledges that this tendency to understand life as having a symbolic order is a part of human nature: the individual, because his knowledge is limited spatially and temporally, will always be enslaved to their limited lens of experience, and so cut himself off from reality, the greater whole. “...[T]hat which was at first but an inclination in the shore in which a thought was harbored becomes an individual lake, cut off from the ocean, wherein the thought secures its own conditions, changes, perhaps, from salt to fresh, becomes a sweet sea, dead sea, or a marsh” (*Walden* 554). We may follow a course for only so long before it becomes detached from reality; how we order the world, how we understand, must be integrated through our subjective awareness. As Thoreau finds in “Ktaadn,” we cannot think in chaos, but only in imperfect, approximate forms that attempt to make a sensical model of this chaos. Nature connects us back to reality, allows us to free ourselves from the habits of symbolic ordering.

But this freedom from our symbolic construction of “reality” always has the danger of making us victim to a new ordering of the world. “Nature is hard to overcome, but she must be overcome,” he declares in the chapter, “Higher Laws” (498). Though human beings must think in form, we must understand these mental constructions to be subjective. It is human nature, human instinct, to let the facts of life be subverted to our understanding of the world. It is only through experimentation that we can reinstate the proper place of our understanding to be determined by the facts of life we have witnessed. Experimentation is, for Thoreau, enacted in both the external world as well as in his mental conception of this world: this is because he understands their subtle connection to one another. In his *Journal*, Thoreau reveals his dedication to chronicling natural phenomena. He “strives to note the world without attempting to capture it,” keeping data of “botanical facts as they appeared in the course of the seasons...based on the premise that he might thereby discover natural, seasonal rhythms in the human unconscious” (Bennett 308; McIntosh 29). By observing the natural phenomena, he begins to confront his unconscious conditioning of attitude and behavior,—his physiological and mental reaction to Natural change —, with the correspondence between the rhythm of the seasons and the rhythm of his thoughts. His dedicated observance of the particular aspects of nature leads him to understand the particular aspects of his own psychology. He must leave behind his habitually contained experience by noting the phenomena which surround him, and inevitably conduct his understanding of things.

Acknowledging that people so easily “fall into a particular route,” depending on the symbolic form they have constructed to contain their experience, Thoreau points to a certain helplessness that is integral to the human condition. More times than not, people will not create a

path for themselves, but follow the path of another. Everyday tasks become habitual, where a single conscious effort becomes unconsciously repeated until there is no conscious effort whatsoever to see these tasks to completion. Hence we “fall” from the clarity of the present moment, unaware of and alien to ourselves, still existing in the past. Through experimentation, however, we can deliver ourselves back into the present. People tend to see themselves locked into the course of life they have set themselves down. Yet, more times than naught, when trapped within this mental space, our determination to stay within its course, its constructed order, will only leave us distressed in the sobering face of reality. We are convinced that there is a right way, and tend thus on a path of our own conceiving, envisioning success at its end. Thoreau, however, reminds us that we at times find ourselves hard pressed “to determine whither we will walk,” convinced that “there is a subtile magnetism in Nature, which, if we unconsciously yield to it, will direct us aright” (“Walking” 233). This is not to say that we must integrate ourselves with nature, leaving our town life behind; rather, it is to say that in nature, we may experience the limits of our knowledge: our constructed conceptions of order are put to test. In Nature we may test the boundaries of our idealized conceptions, from which we are instructed whither to go next.

Direction is, at heart, merely imaginary,—it is ephemeral and bound to alter. It creates “the path we love to travel in the interior and ideal world”; but it is only when we placed upon a real path through the woods that we may “find it difficult to choose our direction, because it does not yet exist distinctly in our idea” (234). In “Economy,” the opening chapter of *Walden*, Thoreau states that it “appears” that people have “deliberately chosen the common mode of living because they preferred it to any other” (*Walden* 329). He imbues this passage with an



accusatory tone, asking people of an apparently Christian nation to reconsider “the words of the catechism” regarding the “chief end of man,” which is to glorify God. Thoreau, who preferred the religious doctrines of India and China to Judeo-Christian sentiments, begs his fellow citizens who profess their religion so ardently to actually *read* the words of a central doctrine to their religion, honing in specifically on the definition of God. These people “who honestly think there is no choice left” excepting the common mode of life, to Thoreau’s sensibilities, have not glorified God, but cut him short by following such a finite and narrow model of life that might guarantee a spot beyond the Pearly Gates. By forcing his fellow citizens to reconsider the definition of God, Thoreau allows them to reconsider their own position in life, which they have taken as being permanent because it is where they currently are. But his new formulation of “the chief end of man” forces the individual to question his position and, thus, he begins to locate himself. Stanley Cavell connects Thoreau’s commentary on the “mass of men [who] lead lives of quiet desperation” (329) with his words on necessity. “It expresses the opinion that our current necessities are our final ones. We have defined our lives in front. What at first seems like a deliberate choice turns out to be a choice all right (they honestly think there is no choice left), but not a deliberate one, not one weighed and found good, but one taken without pondering, or lightly; they have never preferred it. And yet this is nothing less than a choice of one’s life” (Cavell 73). People believe the choices they have made in their lives have a single and narrow trajectory that is defined from the beginning to its projected end. Where people are now is a testament to where they will be going, determined in their direction and helpless because they have “defined” their lives “in front.” They have made choices that were not wholly their choosing; that is, that were not consciously decided, not “weighed and found good.” Cavell

connects this human sense of finality with Thoreau's words on necessity because it begs the reader to question what the bare necessities to living are; not what the materials are necessary to preserve one's position in life, as in a precedent network of choices, but what the necessary materials are to live and be on this earth; it is so that we might possess our choices, instead of allowing our choices to have possession over us.

Staying near to Cavell's words on our tendency to "define our lives in front," and its connection to Thoreau's challenge to constantly "weigh" those objects in our lives we see as necessary, Thoreau's moment of becoming lost in the woods allows him, by necessity, to "weigh" the materials he needs to find his way again. The dimly lit nighttime causes him to step outside of his habitual path to Concord; because of the abnormal conditions of light, he is able to remove himself from the actions of his "past" self by utilizing the bare necessities (i.e. his senses) with his inability to see. This abnormality of the external factors, such as light, grants Thoreau the opportunity to create a new path for himself; he must orient himself and find his way out again. It is only by placing ourselves in abnormal conditions that we may again be conscious, reinstating a pure relation between our senses, the external world and our selves. How Thoreau is able to actualize this pure relation is inherent in his proclamation that he "must shift for [him]self": the original sentiment which sent him from Concord into the woods. He sees himself as separate from the habitual normalcies of Concord town-life, declaring his detestation for being swept in with "the mass of men [who] lead lives of quiet desperation." In the opening chapter of *Walden*, "Economy," Thoreau goes on to comment on the self-induced plight of his fellow Concordians:

When we consider what, to use the words of the catechism, is the chief end of man, and what are the true necessities and means of life, it appears as if men had deliberately chosen the common mode of living because they preferred it to any other. Yet they honestly think there is no choice left. But alert and healthy natures remember that the sun rose clear. It is never too late to give up prejudices. No way of thinking or doing, however ancient, can be trusted without proof. What every body echoes or in silence passes by as true to-day may turn out to be falsehood tomorrow, mere smoke of opinion, which some had trusted for a cloud that would sprinkle fertilizing rains on the fields. What old people say you cannot do you try and find that you can. Old deeds for old people, and new deeds for new.

*(Walden 329)*

The greatest danger of losing touch with oneself, for Thoreau, is assenting to a fatal and immutable mode of being, of choosing “the common mode of living” as a point which persuades the mind into believing that “there is no choice left.” The common mode of living is precisely that of submitting to the established norm, of working towards some other vision of betterment and progress than one’s own. This is much like Beldoch’s characterization of the Therapeutic to surround himself with objects which may deliver us into an idealized self. Through the habit of living under such an authority, historical and societal prejudices become engraved in the mind’s conception of the world; the security of one’s place in the community only deafens the individual to the value of his own voice. Thoreau depicts a people not characterized by activity, by interaction, but by preservation of the little property they possess, the inkling of order they feel themselves to understand in the world.

Rieff identifies culture as being a system of ordered symbols that carry “moralizing demands...by which men are guided in their conduct” to ensure its own unity. The ordering of these symbols imprints itself onto an individual’s consciousness, affecting their sense of the world. The Therapeutic, as I mentioned earlier on, is repelled by this ordering because he wishes to preserve an “individual,” self-aggrandizing sense of order. Thoreau is also repelled by this adherence to a culture’s symbolic ordering, but not because he wishes to preserve an individual sense of order; he confronts the wildness of nature so that he may transgress his own narrow ordering of the world: he is able to observe his idea of order as simply hypothetical, awaiting the proving grounds of Nature,—of the real world—, to test the rigidity of his conception. In *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, Thoreau’s first book, one can see the seeds of rumination on people’s inability to escape these societal definitions that subtly but undeniably affect our thinking. “However flattering order and expediency may look, it is but the repose of a lethargy, and we will choose rather to be awake, though it be stormy, and maintain ourselves on this earth and in this life, as we may, without signing our death-warrant. Let us see if we cannot stay here, where He has put us, on his own conditions. Does not his law reach as far as his light?” (*A Week* 108). Playing with the image of light, and its ability to awaken, Thoreau makes a commentary on the stagnancy of order. If we adhere to order alone, it is “but the repose of a lethargy,” a laziness of spirit which is unable to escape the bounds of its own definitions. He points to the natural fact of our being here, on the earth, now, as that is where some Creator has placed us. It is a matter of taking the resources available and pushing forth into unknown territories. One must leave the bounds of the path to see just how far the “light” may reach, and to experiment in how we live

under this “law”. Only in experimentation can we actually begin to know what this “law” even is.

Thoreau sees in his mid-nineteenth century American society a perverse and inhumane sense of the Divine. Glorifying God has become equated to modeling an entire life by some singular goal of reaching heaven. Thoreau sees this as not only a ridiculous method to approach divinity, given that it is a narrow and humanly formulated path which could never contain the entirety of God; this method of approaching God, which is mediated through the dictates of some Christian institution, further blinds and disorients the individual from any sense of self. Instead, Thoreau pitches an interpretation of the glorification of God to be an incessant annihilation of integrated order: “Our notions of law and harmony are commonly confined to those instances which we detect; but the harmony which results from a far greater number of seemingly conflicting, but really concurring, laws, which we have not detected, is still more wonderful. The particular laws are as our points of view...” (*Walden* 554). To experiment, which is nothing more than to seek out a different point of view, allows us to escape the “confined...instances which we detect” that have provided our “notions of law and harmony.” Here Thoreau exposes the use of “God” in religious institution, which is itself a symbolic term to both define and enforce that institutions idea of order,—its idea of the “law” that forcefully conducts our thoughts and movements. Experimentation is an explicitly human process, which does not at all negate the Divine, but in fact expands, perhaps justifies, its ubiquity. Thoreau here makes a claim for movement to hold more reverence for God than any religious institution might. By a single act of experiment, of stepping outside the path, the individual both frees himself from the strictures of his institutions and invites a grander definition of the divine law.

The call for experimentation that provides fertile soil to awake ourselves by “an infinite expectation of the dawn.” Through experiment we may observe our environment through alternate positions of the self; thus, we may observe ourselves. This now brings us now to another concern that is inherent to Thoreau’s notion of becoming lost: perception, where the eyes dependence on light, ends up leading the individual away from their path. Perception, especially as it pertains to the eyes, is essential to orienting oneself. Seeking out familiar features which distinguish one particular environment from another, we depend on vision to locate ourselves; and yet, the eyes may also cause us to deviate from a more grounded, empirical understanding of reality. The dual nature of Thoreau’s musings on paths, that is, regarding their function as guides, finds a similar manifestation in his musings on perception. Though the eyes obfuscate any sense of objective truth on a metaphysical level; they serve as our main source of our subjective interpretation of the world. The fact that Thoreau becomes lost from his path at night indicates that he becomes lost because his ability to see, which is dependent on light, is nullified in darkness. He unconsciously depends on his eyes so heavily that, when they are made obsolete, he becomes lost. It is in this moment that he confronts his own limits, his own subjectivity; and in doing so, he is able to, albeit for the smallest increment of time, garner a more intimate acquaintance with objectivity, opened up in the realm of Nature.

The fact that the eye is dependent on light is, for Thoreau, of the utmost concern. Though the eye predominantly delude the mind from reality, Thoreau takes this weakness of the eye to also be its greatest strength. Reflecting on the words of Emerson, who in *Nature*, calls the eye the greatest artist and its relation to the poet, “he whose eye can integrate all the parts,” Thoreau takes up this notion as a springboard into the importance of the eye and its ability to cloud itself,

but also its ability to create, “to integrate,” a vision of the world that lies before it (*Nature* 38). Perception, for Thoreau, is essentially linked to the imagination, that faculty in us which is creative. When it is used properly, our ability to perceive deeply is our link to the present. In linking sight with the creative faculty of the imagination, he illuminates the “unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor.” He states: “It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look, which morally we can do. To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts” (*Walden* 394). Thoreau begins this passage by dealing with works of art, applauding their ability “to make a few objects beautiful.” A single work of art allows the viewer to perceive an object or a group of objects in light that they were perhaps not considered. But Thoreau pushes this potentiality in art even further, describing life itself as an art. Focussing specifically on the constant faculty of sight, Thoreau challenges us “to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look.” The artistic medium that Thoreau champions is our perceptive ability in the moment, which, unlike a medium like painting or sculpture, does not transplant singular objects from their environment, which is Nature. The medium of perception does not mediate the composition of the natural world, but provides the viewer (who is simultaneously the artist) with an immediate understanding of the aesthetic potential of “the infinite extent of our relations.”

Integrative perception is central to Thoreau’s chapter, “The Ponds,” wherein which he describes the myriad relations by which he may apprehend Walden Pond. In order to capture the totality of the Pond and the environment that encircles it, Thoreau attempts to capitulate it from myriad angles, understanding that by his position the environment visually reveals a different

side of itself to him, otherwise latent to the stationary layman. In the following passage, he describes the different colors the pond may wear:

...looking directly down into our waters from a boat, they are seen to be of very different colors. Walden is blue at one time and green at another, even from the same point of view. Lying between the earth and the heavens, it partakes of the color of both. Viewed from a hilltop it reflects the color of the sky; but near at hand it is of a yellowish tint next to the shore where you can see the sand, then a light green, which gradually deepens to a uniform dark green in the body of the pond. In some lights, viewed even from a hilltop, it is of a vivid green next to the shore. Some have referred this to the reflection of the verdure; but it is equally green there against the railroad sandbank, and in the spring, before the leaves are expanded, and it may be simply the result of the prevailing blue mixed with the yellow of the sand. Such is the color of its iris... (463-4)

By considering the differing angles of his own position to the pond, as well as the position of the sun above (depending on the time of year) Thoreau allows us to approach Walden Pond in its totality by means of his own displacement. At one moment it is blue, yet in springtime, with the contrasted yellow color of the sandbank by the railroad, the colors combine to create a green; from further away, looking down, the pond is blue, while up close it is of yet a different shade. In other parts of the chapter, he discusses the transparency of Walden's water (465), allowing one to look far below, while at other times it perfectly reflects the clouds above (474). In another scene he describes the rippling effect of the wind upon the water's surface ("I see where the breeze dashes across it by the streaks or flakes of light" (473)). By approaching the pond from differing



positions along its shore or surroundings, he begins to chronicle the pond under change, extraordinarily affected and reimagined by the myriad angles light may touch it.

H. Daniel Peck extrapolates Thoreau's practice of perception, exhibiting his method of displacement as the better worded action of "beholding." "To behold in this way is to emphasize the "holding," not in the sense of possession, but in the sense of a vibrant, organic world brought into being and "held" steadily before us" (*Morning Work* 122). Peck's understanding of "beholding" stresses Thoreau's constant need to displace himself to bring an environment to life by stretching the borders of his limited mode of perception. "Beholding" is a creative method of seeing, where the eye exercises its abilities in composition; in Emerson's words, the eye "integrates" the given objects of a landscape into a single vision. To behold something is to crystalize in a single instance, a momentary lapse of time, attempting to capture all that the eye confronts. In this light, to behold something is very similar to Thoreau's understanding of an art piece, which suspends an object or group of objects in beauty. Thoreau's method of beholding, however, does not remove or isolate these objects from their environment, but rather approaches the natural undisturbed state of these objects, knitted into the fabric of their original places and relations. To behold something, as Peck notes, is not possession: the objects are not made property, and the beholder remains impoverished, acquiescent to the limits of vision. With "behold" there is no possession over the landscape: "Wherever I sat, there I might live, and the landscape radiated from me accordingly" (*Walden* 387). With beholding, one has possession of the self, which is the axial for understanding that the landscape, and all objects, are a possession of the mind: their aesthetic detail and significance are constructive acts of the mind. And so to capture the entirety of an environment, which is of course an infinitude that can only be

approached by Thoreau's constant displacement of himself in order to behold as many unified scenes in a given environment as there are positions by which to see.

Peck is able to show how Thoreau's method of perception is explicit in its awareness of human limits: we cannot "behold" everything at once Thoreau's method is also explicit in understanding that this inability to behold everything at once is not only a spatial issue, but a temporal one. Even if the eye could contain everything in a single moment, persistent change in Nature's composition must still be taken into account. In her essay, "Wilderness and Wildness in Thoreauvian Science," Laura Dassow Walls discusses Alexander von Humboldt, the famous Prussian naturalist whose "exact, detailed, holistic, and interactive field studies" (*Thoreau's Sense of Place* 18) influenced the scientific field of Ecology as well as many American writers of the nineteenth century. Humboldt's writings and method of collecting data began to show that nature was not "the product of divine design but self-generating." There is no order in nature except for in the moment, of what the eye can contain: "...order was not dictated rationally from above but emerged cooperatively from below, from the collective interactions of constituent individuals. This implied that nature was not just analogous to, but actually was, a historical process subject to chance and contingency..." This positing of nature as "self-generating" dispels any sense of order which people attempt to place on it, whether imbued with notions of divine design or attempted to contain it with scientific laws and definitions. The beholding eye thus will attempt to conceive of an order in the natural world; but in attempting again, experimenting with its position, Thoreau's method of perception constantly dispels the order which had previously been established.

By combatting his all-too human propensity to habit, Thoreau must ultimately experiment with the borders of his narrow medium of perception. His time at Walden Pond acquainted him with the inevitable fate of becoming yoked to a sense of order, which must be reduced by an actual relation to the material world of Nature. The problem with order is that it can only address stagnancy: it is merely an idea that must be expanded, refined or developed to accommodate the effect of time. In other words, our stagnant order must face the constancy of the stream of life. Nature is perfectly synonymous, for Thoreau, with “reality” or “life”, because it is contained by the effects of change. Nature was here longer than man was. By placing ourselves in Nature, Thoreau believes that we can become accustomed to a truer sense of eternity, as dictated by the effect of change, than our stagnant institutions and “locations” have to offer.

## Chapter II

In the last chapter, I attempted to garner an understanding of Thoreau's notion of experimentation. Our freedom to experiment, to test the bounds of our conceiving the world, allows us to transcend a stale order we had arranged our lives around. It causes us to confront our blind obedience to the habits we have unconsciously gathered over the course of our lives. In his discourse surrounding experimentation, Thoreau reveals his impulse to criticize the function of society and its tendencies. He shows how easily an individual may become a servant to habitude; yet, even in solitude, Thoreau still realizes his own susceptibility to habit. In placing himself in solitude by Walden Pond, he realizes that even in "the tonic of wildness" he finds himself making a distinct and particular path through the woods, "though it is five or six years since I trod it, it is still quite distinct" (*Walden* 579). He admits that even in as pure a realm as Nature, his prolongation of the human trail must leave its mark: the mark, that is, of habit. "I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there" (579); the need for experimentation must drive him away from any dwelling he has made for himself. He shows how he must remain a critic, especially unto himself, to keep a conscious relation to the world.

But Thoreau's idealized state of self-consciousness, though a valiant effort, at first glance appears equally pedantic in its effort. Incessant experimentation and self-criticism leads to a constant unraveling of the self, void of action, concerned merely with a pure reception of life. *Walden* has been described as a "self-improvement narrative, written as a redemptive moral for American society," behind which "is the fear of losing...his sense of self." The "very prominence of this fear is...evidence of its potential collapse" (Abbott 200). The possibility of losing his sense of self is vital to our understanding Thoreau's project at Walden Pond, and it is a

danger that he must consistently face. And it should be understood that this confrontation with his potential collapse serves to reveal how a person's life, the habits that compose their being, influences how they interpret, or receive, the world. People are moulded by their environments. Thoreau is interested in revealing how our "sense of self" is mediated by the objects that compose our lives. The self is constructed by myriad forces in tenuous embrace; our sense of self is always on the verge of crisis,—never determined. His project at Walden Pond, and his departure from, reveals to him the true impressionability of human beings, by way of natural or ideological influences. In "Higher Laws," Thoreau claims that "[o]ur whole life is startlingly moral," honing in on "the animal in us, which awakens in proportion as our higher nature slumbers" (*Walden* 496, 497). This internal animal does not merely construct an image of man's more natural side; rather, it is a warning against allowing our sensual faculties to take over our conscious understanding of the world. The animal in all of us must interact with life, dependent on the senses; Thoreau insists that it is only by our "higher nature," our intellectual faculties, that our sensory experience may become consciously understood, and, only then, are we made consciously aware of the world we dwell in.

As I argued in the previous chapter, Thoreau certainly requires his senses to orient himself and be reborn to "the infinite extent of [his] relations." Yet he cannot allow his dependence on the sensuous faculties take control of his intellectual capacity, through which he composes his sense of order in the world. For Thoreau, there must be a constant dialogue between our senses and our intellect, so that we do not fall victim to our senses: "[t]here is never an instant's truce between virtue and vice" (496). Though his conduct of life is fraught with self-criticism, Thoreau maintains his presence in this world; he does not seek to leave the world

behind, but wishes to be in constant communion with it: “[W]e are enabled to apprehend at all what is sublime and noble only by the perpetual instilling and drenching of the reality that surrounds us” (399). His need for experimentation derives from his fear of becoming victim of any stagnant apprehension of the world by remaining on the cusp that separates his self from “reality.”

Immediately following this he says, “[t]he universe constantly and obediently answers to our conceptions; whether we travel fast or slow, the track is laid for us. Let us spend our lives in conceiving then” (399). Thoreau here speaks of the autonomy of peoples’ understanding of the world; “the universe constantly and obediently answers to our conceptions,” and with one bit of knowledge, we may tend to be led too far along by our own understanding, assuming we possess a greater bit of knowledge than we, in reality, actually have. Thoreau acknowledges the resilience and determination of the imagination, which composes the universe into the form of our conception, which dictates understanding. If we remain too confident in our conceptions, however, we become vulnerable to the deadly spell of indifference, while “the laws of the universe are not indifferent, but are forever on the side of the most sensitive” (497). By the fact of the self’s psychological and physiognomical impressionability, we are connected to the natural order of the world. This does not mean that we should give ourselves over to this natural order (because our conception of such an order would most likely be ill-guided and a simplification), nor does it mean that the mind should become indifferent, that is, unwilling to receive the sensitive changes of expression of the natural world. Thoreau studies the natural world incessantly because his “knowledge,” his being, is so oriented by his mind’s conception. In tending to the natural world, he tends to his self. Thus, we have two sides to Thoreau’s theory of

mind: in one moment he tells us that we must utilize the imagination to apprehend our confrontations with reality, but simultaneously tells us to keep our convictions on this apprehended vision separate from this faculty's great power: we must incessantly use the imagination, yet not become entrenched in a single idea of order we have apprehended by the utility of this power. We must live by the powers of the imagination, which forms and unifies our experience, yet we must constantly utilize it, so that we do not fall victim to it; so that we do not adjust ourselves to our symbolic interpretation of the world. Thoreau's challenge is not an easy one: to apprehend a world simply pregnant with meaning that "will obediently answer[] to our conceptions" if we allow it. We must pay respect to the world's "obedience" to our imaginative powers by overcoming our servitude to the reality we have conceived. We must not allow that our conceptions override our convictions on the world: they must always obey the material "law" of Nature.

These past several pages are meant to prepare the reader for the next aspect of Thoreau's project at Walden Pond, which allows us to comprehend the creative aspect of his theory of mind: that is, the role of reading in the individual's life. The relation between a book, or rather a text (such as a poem) and its reader is viewed by Thoreau as a microcosm of the ideal relation an individual must have with the world, which is represented in Thoreau's constant need for experimentation. Reading allows us to witness ourselves in the act of interpretation. We are always interpreting the things we apprehend: it enables us to make sense of the world we live in. Interpretation is the capacity of the imagination to discern.

But the relation we must garner with a book, like Thoreau's ideal relation to the natural world, is not merely a passive reception of the words on the page; Thoreau insists that "[t]o read well, that is, to read the true books in a true spirit, is a noble exercise" (403). It is a task that engages the entire being of the reader, who "must laboriously seek the meaning of each word and line," aware that his own experience influences his understanding of the text. This awareness is necessary in order to "conjectur[e] a larger sense than common use permits" (403).

[Reading] requires a training such as the athletes underwent, the steady intention almost of the whole life to this object. Books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written. It is not enough even to be able to speak the language of that nation by which they are written, for there is a memorable interval between the spoken and the written language, the language heard and the language read. The one is commonly transitory, a sound, a tongue, a dialect merely, almost brutish, and we learn it unconsciously, like the brutes, of our mothers. The other is the maturity and experience of that; if that is our mother tongue, this is our father tongue, a reserved and select expression, too significant to be heard by the ear, which we must be born again in order to speak. (403)

Thoreau here makes a distinction between the spoken word, the "mother" of language, in contrast to the written word, "our father tongue." Though Thoreau's distinction between the manifestations of language by a dichotomy of the sexes illuminates a certain chauvinism in his character, which is an undeniable aspect of his writing and his world view, I would like to walk the reader through a less discriminatory interpretation of his words. The fact that the written word is "reserved" and "too significant to be heard" shows Thoreau's belief in the father tongue's



instructive capacity. The lesson that it might lend is not formulated by the words themselves, but by the voice of the reader that gives life to this (p)reserved utterance: the text must be internalized. Spoken language is transient in that it has no record to claim its significance. It is an echo of the written word, but displaced and reinvigorated by the voice: it may only be heard, making it “transitory,” learned by us “unconsciously.” With the spoken word there is nothing to return to, for it merely acts as an interruption of silence. The written word, on the other hand, has a preservation which persists with the silence, lying in dormancy, which, if tapped into by readers, “will explain our miracles and reveal new ones” (408-9). The permanence of the written word invites the reader to exit from a permanent understanding of the world: “The symbol of an ancient man’s thought becomes a modern man’s speech” (404). Reading engages us in the transmission of thought to symbol (language), and from symbol into speech (understanding). Interpretation exists at every level of our interaction with a book. They “must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written,” the dictates of our speech being attentive to the original utterance of the writer’s thought.

Thoreau’s understanding of speech, then, must not be characterized as strictly spoken (i.e. with the mouth). His distinction between writing and speech is a redefinition of the ancient Greek divide between *logos* and *ergon*, or, rather, between the thought and the act. Speech is action, the interpretation of the word. The spoken word gives the written word meaning; but meaning, for Thoreau, can only be arrived at by the self. This insists that we must bring ourselves to confront the written word, the source of this meaning as well as many others. Stanley Cavell understands this potency of the written word as the origin of meaning, which must be attended to if we are to understand words. “The endless computations of the words of

*Walden*,” he says, “are part of its rescue of language, its return of it to us, its effort to free us and our language of one another, to discover the autonomy of each. For the word to return, what is necessary is not that we compute complexities around it, and also not exactly that we surround it with simplicities, but that we see the complexities it has and the simplicity it may have on a given occasion if we let it” (Cavell 63). The rescue of language is to engage the particular constructions of language, which alone hold meaning together. It is to return us to the definitions of singular words, but also to reveal the permutations of the overall semantic meaning of words when constructed together. “Until we speak again, our lives and our language betray one another,” implying that it is with action that we begin to understand language and its uses (34). We are then able to witness the myriad computations of meaning, that is, *our* meaning. Words are symbols of meaning; but it is when the words are given a form that they indicate any meaning. We use words to convey our own meaning, but this is merely an idea of our meaning,—our sense of self. It is only through action, through being in the world, that we can approach an understanding of our own meaning: we gain an understanding of which words we must use in order to engage a particular meaning/feeling we sense ourselves to apprehend.

To rescue language is to give life back to language. To preserve the life of language, which is brought to life in the moment of our subjective reading of a text, we must live out the text to redeem the spiritual capacity of language. Reading is a revelatory experience that awakens us to our own experience: “There are probably words addressed to our condition exactly, which, if we could really hear and understand, would be more salutary than the morning or the spring to our lives, and possibly put a new aspect on the face of things for us” (*Walden* 408). With reading we may confront a side of ourselves, of our minds, that we never knew

existed. The writer of the words conveys a meaning that brushes with our own experience, illuminates an articulated emotion, yearning to be disclosed. Interestingly enough, the act of reading shows how this disclosure is instigated without the self, though it may dwell near our very core. Books provide an physical manifestation of experience: they are one method of physicalizing the *logos* of our selves. Yet, Thoreau is interested in this physicalization of idea in a realm beyond the confines of a book and verbal formalities. In the opening lines of the chapter “Sounds,” which immediately succeeds “Reading,” Thoreau states that “while we are confined to books, though the most select and classic, and read only particular written languages, which are themselves but dialects and provincial, we are in danger of forgetting the language which all things and events speak without metaphor, which alone is copious and standard” (411). Though books in themselves are powerful tools to awakening ourselves, they are above all tools to sharpen the perceptive ability of our imagination. Studying the classical languages, by the fact that they are progenitors of the English Language, serve to enhance our understanding of our own Mother Tongue by “perpetual suggestions and provocations” (403) of a language preserved solely in writing, such as ancient Greek. It stretches our own imaginative abilities, in connecting and bridging our thoughts and findings into a more comprehensive whole; that is, of stretching the scope of our knowledge to further realms. This then must be applied to the natural world as well, whereby we may recognize “the infinite extent of our relations,” of the objects (much like the words of a text) which compose our life.

Reading is for Thoreau a piece to a much larger puzzle. The puzzle is mainly his concern for how ideas are manifest. Thoreau is most interested in the physicality of language; how it can

deliver idea into a more substantive form. Yet, he is well aware that this is mainly an exercise in perceiving and understanding the world outside of the limited scope of literature. But all the same, Thoreau uses this relation between reader and text to point to his greater concern for human perception. Another voice who might aid us in parsing out Thoreau's belief in the connection between reading and conscious experience is Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Both are concerned with the powers of the human mind, which composes an idea of the world it is immersed in; and, more importantly, they are both concerned with making this a harmonious relation, in order that the mind does not project its sense of self too ardently upon the world. In his magnum opus, *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge discusses the written works which have sculpted his thought. This, however, is a surface of the text's main discussion, which is infused equally with an attempted theory of the subject/object relationship, which scholars like I.A. Richards claim as being central to understanding Coleridge as a thinker. Yet his theory of subject/object is as much influenced by his base of philosophic thought as it is by his interactions with both the reading and writing of poetry. The subject-object relation between reader and poem is a model Coleridge utilizes to understand the subject-object relation between self and the world. The model is

an instrument for noting, and insisting, that nothing of which we are in any way conscious is *given* to the mind. Into the simplest seeming 'datum' a constructing, forming activity from the mind has entered. And the perceiving and the forming are the same. The subject (the self) has gone into what it perceives, and what it perceives is, in the same sense, itself. So the object becomes the subject and the subject the object. And as, to understand what Coleridge is saying, we must not

take the object as something given to us; so equally, we must not take the subject to be a mere empty formless void out of which all things mysteriously and ceaselessly rush to become everything we know. The subject is what it is through the objects it has been. (Richards 56-7)

Coleridge's understanding of the relation between subject and object reveals his belief that what we are conscious of is enacted through a process of our own "constructing"; "the perceiving" an object and "the forming" of our conscious knowledge of this object are simultaneous actions. What we perceive, therefore, is a process of becoming the subject; this becoming is mediated through the objects we have perceived. It is not to say, however, that the subject is overtaken by the object in the subject's conscious recognition of it (remember James' defining the self as "plastic"). The subject's state of consciousness is formed by "the objects it has been," or, by its construction of the objects' meanings, thus granting the objects their place in our consciousness.

In Coleridge's own words, a subject is that "which becomes a subject by the act of constructing itself objectively to itself" (Coleridge 273). The role of subject is to orient the world towards its self, to give form to the world in order that our conscious understanding of the world has a dwelling. The objects of experience only become objects by the subject's perception of them; and as they become objects, the subject himself comes into being, by his recognition of their being objects. Coleridge's abstract language appears overcomplicated and arbitrary unless we recognize its structural integrity in the *Biographia*. In the opening page, he confesses that "the least of what I have written [in the present work] concerns myself personally" (Coleridge 5). If we consider his words on the relation between subject and object, however, we can see a certain facetiousness in this opening. The *Biographia* is "a statement of my principles in Politics,

Religion, and Philosophy, and an application of the rules, deduced from philosophical principles, to poetry and criticism”; and these principles and rules are perhaps taken from other thinkers, yet they are made Coleridge’s by his synthesis of the thoughts together, in order to settle “the long continued controversy concerning the true nature of poetic diction” and “at the same time to define with the utmost impartiality the real poetic character of the poet.” He says he has accomplished this with the “utmost impartiality” not to insist that he has arrived at any objective truth, but that the entirety of *Biographia Literaria* marks the impartiality of himself *towards his self*. The words that make up the *Biographia* are made up by the thoughts of others, by they are told through Coleridge’s own language; the impartiality comes through a critical stance by which he faces his self; the self being, in other words, the thoughts he has become throughout his life: the purported body of the *Biographia*.

Coleridge’s explication of his favored ancient Greek maxim, “Know Thyself,” as being both a speculative and practical action, allows us to easily access his idea of “utmost impartiality.” “We must be more than merely aware,” Richards interprets from this, “we must be aware of our awareness, and of the form and operation of our awareness. The rest...is a verbal machine for exhibiting what the exercise of this postulate [“Know Thyself”] or this act of contemplation yielded” (Richards 47). Coleridge recognizes the shortcomings of the human subject, who depends on the senses to gain understanding of the world; and this dependence requires our “awareness of our awareness,”—that is, that our knowledge of objects is only actualized with the coincidence of the subject with these objects. Coleridge is after a particular symbiotic relation between the subject and the external world. But Coleridge, like Thoreau, does not prescribe that the subject go with the flow of the external world, lest he lose his sense of self.

The sense of self may only be retained in a self-conscious state, requiring that we garner an awareness of the self's sensitivity to the objects which compose its world. James Engall interprets Coleridge's subject-object dialectic as a "process of uniting an inherent "abstract self" with objective reality" (Engall 334). Because "[o]ur intelligent self-consciousness becomes inseparable from our perceptions of the world," Coleridge makes us understand that, without this dialectic, "every object is, as an object, dead, fixed, incapable in itself of any action, and necessarily finite" (Coleridge 279). As with the meaning of a text, the subject (the reader), must be conscious of the objects that have constituted the composition of his experience.

Yet, Coleridge insists that we "must in some sense dissolve this identity [of and the discrimination between subject-object], in order to be conscious of it" (279). We may only be conscious of our experience by understanding the unity of ourselves to the objects we perceive. In the case of books, the meaning the subject gains from reading is dependent on the semantic permutations and manifestations of language; yet it is the subject who is composing this meaning. The reader must interpret the overall composition of the text. It is by our attentiveness to the particularities of language that we may approach its meaning with impartiality. Only by this attention to detail can we overcome the tendency to project an "abstract self" too forcefully upon the "objective reality" of the text: and it is a tendency in all human beings, since we must project in order to understand.

The same model applies itself, especially for Thoreau, to the world outside of books. Thoreau, like Coleridge, attempts to reach a place of impartiality towards the world and himself. Coleridge, however, attempts to achieve this impartiality through his life in Letters. In the chapter, "Sounds," Thoreau insists that exclusively living in literature will place us "in danger of

forgetting the language which all things and events speak without metaphor” (*Walden* 411). He upholds “the necessity of being forever on the alert,” that is, of being attentive to the objects of this world which might also “explain our miracles and reveal new ones.” Coleridge’s words on the relation between the text and the reader are still valuable in our understanding of Thoreau’s theory of mind, and the subject’s responsibility towards finding unity in the objects that compose our lives.

Thoreau stresses that the our digestion of words in a book transcends the written word: he asks us to “*hear* and understand” the language that the world is composed of; our experience is constructed by “the at present *unutterable* things we may find somewhere *uttered*” by the “wise men” who have attempted to “answer” these eternal confounding questions “by his words and his *life*.” This emphasis on extra-textual experience shows a second, more cyclical, aspect to the reading process, which is experiencing our confirmed revelations of self via the word. “The book exists” not only to “explain our miracles” but “to reveal new ones” as well. With true reading, the text should extend itself into life outside of the book. By the sheer fact that we must understand a book through a compendium of past experience are we able to see just how dependent meaning is to the subject/reader’s imagination. The book’s capacity to confirm these amorphous experiences requires that we return again to the world, that we synthesize the text into our conduct of life, both past and present.

In order to bring the realms of thought and action together by way of language, Thoreau also must broaden the range of language into the world as well, so that it does not remain idea. Through this process, meaning is once again established in the world, from whence our words



originally derived. In the “Conclusion” of *Walden*, Thoreau addresses the fate of language, whereby “[t]he volatile truth of our words should continually betray the inadequacy of the residual statement. Their truth is instantly *translated*; its literal monument alone remains” (580-1). Here Thoreau is speaking particularly of how we must not let words define the self: “we should live quite laxly and undefined in front, our outlines dim and misty on that side” (580). Our use of words in order to construct meaning is immediately a translation into something comprehensible; but it is a translation of the truth that the words were intended to contain. But we may also think of this passage through a more liberal lens, whereby the use of language and its translation of the truth are analogous to our actions in relation to our code of ethics. The code of ethics in nineteenth century America has, in Thoreau’s eyes, strayed too far from true ethics. His project must take place in Nature in order that he may immerse himself in the “ethical” proceedings of Nature. This is not to say that Nature is ethical, nor even that we must live wholly in and with Nature; but in Nature Thoreau is able to live in a realm free from the dictates of the “ethics” of his society, whereby he can acquaint himself with an ethical sense of the world in scenes of the wild. Ethics, in the Thoreauvian sense, is not a code, but a way of life; “[i]t is the law of average,” he says (554). That is, Thoreau understands the constant application of trial-and-error to be at the heart of any ethical conduct. It is only by putting our ideas (and all of our perceptions are merely ‘idea’) into practice that we can understand their meaning and consequence. It is a means of acting in the world, of viewing the permutations of language by viewing the various positions of ourselves. And since ethics is so often transmitted through language, such as in the case of maxims that serve to conduct the individual away from wrong, we must understand Thoreau’s ethics through a verbal lens.

The self, like the objects that compose one's experience, may be observed from various positions. This does not mean that the self is necessarily a single, immutable substance or not. It does imply that it is "yet to be subdued", and therefore must be sought after. Stanley Cavell dwells for a while on the notion of Thoreau's time at Walden as an experiment in orienting, or, finding, himself. "The fate of having a self—of being human—is one in which the self is always to be found; fated to be sought, or not; recognized, or not. My self is something, apparently, toward which I can stand in various relations..." (Cavell 53). The self, whatever it might be, requires an effort if one is to approach or understand it. By placing himself in various positions to Nature, Thoreau is able to witness the contradictions of a self-actuated language used to conceptualize his conduct; thus, his ethics establishes itself through the refinement and development of his language. In these various positions, alone, Thoreau comes to gain knowledge of his self through an ethical, constantly "shifting," positioning of himself towards the world. A perfect example of this can be found in the chapter, "Brute Neighbors", where he explains the value of remaining in one spot: "You only need sit still long enough in some attractive spot in the woods that all its inhabitants may exhibit themselves to you" (505). As he sits in this spot, a conglomeration of animals of the woods reveal themselves to him: "thither too the wood-cock led her brood, to probe the mud for worms; "there too the turtle-doves sat over the spring"; "or the red squirrel, coursing down the nearest bough, was particularly familiar and inquisitive." As he meditatively plants himself in a single spot, he is able to allow the pregnant character of the woods to reveal itself to him. He surrenders his inclinations to discover new sights, to allow a single sight to mature and allow him make discovery within the stillness. This

multiplicity of creatures, which reveal themselves to Thoreau in his static position, awakens the scene he has placed himself in. They serve as words which give life to the scene of nature.

Another example of this in the chapter “Sounds,” where we see Thoreau attempt to construct the meaning and significance of owls in a scene by Walden Pond; in this scene, perhaps more explicitly than in “Brute Neighbors,” Thoreau understands the presence of these animals to provide a sense of wholesomeness to the scene, which influences his conception of it. He tells us of how the owl’s hoot “is a sound admirably suited to swamps and twilight woods which no day illustrates, suggesting a vast and undeveloped nature which men have not recognized. They represent the stark twilight and unsatisfied thoughts which all have” (422); by considering the hooting of owls Thoreau takes into account its place in the twilight, composing a scene void of sight “which no day” is able to illustrate. The sound of the owls recounts and grounds the scene in the twilight time; their hooting is a sign and marker of the hour of day. Thoreau even goes onto say how the sound “represent[s]” a human depravity of “unsatisfied thoughts,” another symbol perhaps of the “stark twilight” the scene is cast in.

Thoreau’s method of considering the sound of the owls helps add weight to the scene by giving the reader a sense of temporal setting. He ends the same paragraph, discussing the nature of nocturnal animals, “a different race of creatures,” who awake at the final effort of sunlight “to express the meaning of nature there” (422). The singular swamp scene which Thoreau places himself before is moving towards the crepuscular, which is signaled by the sound of the owls. With nightfall, a new group of creatures awakens while the creatures of day move into slumber. With different animals, the same scene is expressed in a wholly different way. The animals might be read as words and modifiers, which convey the meaning of the swamp, provide it with an

altered significance than those creatures of daylight. By considering the animals, the permutations of language both aural and visual, he considers the whole composition of the landscape in which they live and upon which his vision is focused.

But this is only one relation to himself, which is constituted by his surrender to stasis. Later in the chapter he changes his relation to himself by departing from his single place in the woods to follow a single animal, the loon, all the while chronicling its singular path. In his pursuit of the loon, Thoreau here briefly surrenders his own sense of self in order to approach the loon. The loon's "unearthly laugh" indicates to Thoreau the danger of this pursuit. "This was his looning—perhaps the wildest sound that is ever heard here, making the woods ring far and wide. I concluded that he laughed in derision of my efforts, confident of his own resources" (511). In leaving his meditative spot in the woods, Thoreau learns the lesson of being driven by the desire to pursue a single thing. He loses his sense of self as it was informed by his static positioning; by leaving his spot in the woods to chase after another vantage by which he may face the world. Shifting his stance towards the world allows him to receive experience in a new fashion. Displacing himself then allows him to garner a more wholesome sense of self, through a newly mediated stream of the objects of his experience. But his departure from the self must always be temporary: he must exit the self only if he may return.

Coming into contact with such a shrewd beast as the loon, Thoreau realizes his own instability of the very self he has been striving to fashion: he witnesses his own connections to society. His ability of deep perception is threatened by whimsical inclination to pursue, causing him to abandon his meditative repose, to abandon his sense of self. Yet this is also an important element of his project. In order to gain a better sense of oneself, one departs from a near-kept

conception of the self. This idea is very Emersonian: “[t]he way of life is wonderful; it is by abandonment” (Emerson 238). The quote insists that one must forget oneself to better know oneself. Yet in society, Thoreau is not able to accomplish this dialectic of meditation and displacement as easily. He speaks of the desperation of the laborer, “so occupied with factitious cares.” “He has no time to be any thing but a machine. How can he remember well his ignorance—which his growth requires—who has so often to use his knowledge?” (*Walden* 327). In society, one is not able to “remember his ignorance,” because the fast schedule of blind labor tears us from insight and rumination. Thoreau must leave to the woods, where this insight may be gained, and his ignorance recognized. It is only in this solitary state that he can transgress his ignorance and witness his own displacement of self.

One cannot discuss *Walden* without attending to Thoreau’s solitude. It is in isolation that he can approach the self experimentally. Only then may he “drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion” (*Walden* 394-5). Thoreau, like many of us, is interested in getting to the essence of matters. His proclamation here is that he must will himself into life, on his terms. As a book *Walden* reveals the success and the defeat of Thoreau’s experiment. Even though he is outside of the bounds of society, he still falls victim to habit, to his symbolic ordering of his experience. But it is essential to his experiment at Walden Pond that he is alone: in solitude he can better weigh the terms of his humanness,—the grip of habit. The fact that the narrative of *Walden* is so consciously constructed around the “narrowness...of

experience.” In other words it is written in the first person: “I should not talk so much about myself if there were any body else whom I knew as well” (325). As a functionary in the book, Thoreau, as the character/narrator, is the symbol his readers will inevitably take upon as themselves if they choose to continue down the narrative’s path. The solitary time of reading *Walden* is mirrored in Thoreau’s solitary life, which is of course the topic of the book.

There is thus a paradox surrounding Thoreau’s time of isolation from his community. Because *Walden* remains as a document, his time of isolation thus socializes itself: his society becomes the readers of his book, who have shared with him his time of solitude in the experience of reading itself. Cavell stresses that *Walden* is a work of “scripture,” which connotes that “its words are revealed, received, and not merely mused” and that the work “must be readable on various, distinct levels,” just as religious doctrine is intended to be read (Cavell 14-5). This does not mean to be merely read on a textual level, but to expand the words of the text, their meaning, into the world around us. To expound on Cavell’s interpretation, the fact that scripture is “revealed,” implies that the words are channeled through the writer by the ordinance of God. In the case of *Walden*, Cavell’s claim does not correspond to any kind of Deity, but rather to a divine exemplification of the self. Because Thoreau is the sole character of the book and becomes the symbol the reader identifies himself with, *Walden* is scripture insofar as we must read his experience as literally manifested in the world around us. For the time of reading we must hold our thoughts in experience, to gain a true and sober revelation of one’s own understanding. Only then may the words exit the ideational realm of the mind and become manifested in the physical; only then may we begin to understand them *as they are*.

Unless the meanings of these words are removed from the text and brought to life in the world, they are essentially detached from the world, signifying nothing. For these words to be understood, digestible, they must find their way out of the text, and this can only be done by the will and effort of the reader. The reader must utilize his sensory experience to bring these words to life; to grace their meaning of celestial origins by the contingency of our physical existence. Thoreau shows this need for “no higher heaven than the pure senses can furnish, a purely sensuous life” in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, as a commentary on Christianity, which tends to make such a separation between the base existence on earth with the purity of Heaven. In so doing, Thoreau reveals a more pantheistic, and sensual, relation to divinity:

The ears were made, not for such trivial uses as men are wont to suppose, but to hear celestial sounds. The eyes were not made for such grovelling uses as they are now put to and worn out by, but to behold beauty now invisible. May we not see God? Are we to be put off and amused in this life, as it were with a mere allegory? Is not Nature, rightly read, that of which she is commonly taken to be the symbol merely? When the common man looks into the sky, which he has not so much profaned, he thinks it less gross than the earth, and with reverence speaks of "the Heavens," but the seer will in the same sense speak of "the Earths," and his Father who is in them. (*A Week* 310)

The point here is Thoreau’s challenge to his readers “to hear celestial sounds” and “to behold beauty now invisible,” as they exist here on earth. The notion of allegory and symbol serve to stifle our connection to the Divine, making a sensuous experience on earth not a direct

interaction with God, but a hint towards a higher power, an echo of the creation as it was made by God, though now separate. Nature, for Thoreau, cannot be “read” as mere allegory or symbol of another, higher power, but as a literal manifestation of this higher power, like the seer who “will...speak of “the Earths,” in which we must seek for the Father’s dormant existence . This perhaps more Pagan embodiment of the seer is the better reader, in the Thoreauvian sense. He sees that words, revealed to the writer of scripture, must find their place again in the physical realm. Our honing in on the meaning of language can only come with our sensuous interaction with these words as they are physically manifested on the earth. We cannot keep the words as exclusive to the text, nor can we keep their meaning forever fastened to the celestial realm; we must indeed search for them in the sights and sounds in everyday experience: to bring the Divine here on earth by willful effort and mastery of language, not to await our eventual deliverance into static Word of the heavens. As with our understanding a text, the meaning only exists in the application of the text to the self. Reading is the process of grounding the “celestial sounds” into the physical, in that we might “behold [their] beauty.”

One’s subjective understanding of a text or a word must be recycled into every day experience, back into the world from whence it originally came: the word must be understood in act as well as in word; it is only then that the meaning of the word might gain a life in practical application, whereby the meaning may be read as well as witnessed. In so doing, the meaning overcomes its potential stasis of acceptance. Cavell’s interest in asserting that *Walden* is essentially scripture lends us to inquire into the religious connotations of his statement, particularly concerning the inextricable relation between scripture and ritual. For Cavell to refer to *Walden* as scripture, he not only points to the care with which the text is read, but also its



eventual internalization, which is integral to its proper reading. Internalization might include recitation of a text or its enactment, such as in the prescribed proceedings for a sacrifice. *Walden* is not a scriptural compendium of ritual proceedings, whose true readers must enact just as Thoreau had; rather it is scripture in so far as it challenges and instructs us to treat experience as scripture, whereby nothing is out of place or meaningless, but to be incessantly attended by our consciousness.

In reading, we become acquainted with words, the differing order in how they appear before us, tapping out a rhythm and a meaning that our minds may easily forget without constant attendance to a text. In many ways, words of literature are captured musings of something very spiritual: of feeling and of experience. The fact that this aspect of spirit is preserved in the physical record of language, we are thus granted the opportunity to interact with this aspect of the spirit. But being that language is a preserved form of something much less tenable or definite, the skilled reader must be able to stretch words past the limit of denoted definition. We do this every time we read: the spirit of interpretation begs us to take the words out of their given context, isolated in sections and particular instances within the text, in order to bring about some comprehensive meaning of the text. Yet in the effort to do so, the reader dissects the preserved whole of the text, thus never able to never contain its wholeness under a single reading.

This preserved whole of a book, the entire composition of its words and thoughts, is, in my mind, a large matter for Thoreau, and one which mirrors itself in his own musings on Nature. When speaking about the “purity” of Walden Pond, there is much similar language he employs to describe it which corresponds to the comprehensive order of a book: an order which indefinitely

is, but can not be explained or repeated by ourselves. Walden Pond has a depth and a surface; the surface is “rippled by the wind” (473); it is “a perfect forest mirror” reflecting the forms which grace itself before it. It particularly reflects the sky, which is directly above it, and it is “remarkable that we can look down on its surface” and “perhaps....mark where a still subtler spirit sweeps over it.” Around the perimeter of Walden Pond, “woodchoppers have laid bare first this shore and then that, and the Irish have built their sties by it, and the railroad has infringed its border, and the ice-men have skimmed it once,” which threatens to destroy the beauty of the pond, though “it is itself unchanged” and “has not acquired one permanent wrinkle after all its ripples (476). He even speaks of his relation to the pond as a man with a book he had discovered in youth and has kept near his heart ever since:

Why, here is Walden, the same woodland lake that I discovered so many years ago; where a forest was cut down last winter another is springing up by its shore as lustily as ever; the same thought is welling up to its surface that was then; it is the same liquid Joy and happiness to itself and its Maker, ay, and it *may* be to me. It is the work of a brave man, in whom there was no guile! He rounded this water with his hand, deepened and clarified it in his thought... (476-7)

The analogous imagery of books and reading makes itself clear, especially at the end of this passage, as the work of an artist, the work, rather, of the mind of an artist. The surface of Walden, like the surface of a book (its language) may be viewed by all, but it is only for he who bathes himself in the waters, who does not attempt to add another ripple to its surface in effort to gain an answer from it, understands what it is there for. He is content who enjoys the serene beauty of canoeing its surface, “and if an oar falls, how sweet the echo” (473).

As with Walden Pond, Thoreau understands the book to be perfectly unified. Many may take pieces of evidence from a book in order to make some grandiose claim as to what it might actually *mean*; but in the end, we must surrender to the “truth” behind the book, of which we will never access. We must accept the terms of our awareness: that is, that when we read a book, we are providing a constructed meaning to the language used. We face only ourselves in reading, which is both our curse and our blessing. We can never attain the truth, but we still might attain ourselves by our efforts.

## Conclusion

What Thoreau realizes in the act of reading is mirrored in his understanding of how one should conduct one's course. We must utilize the powers of the imagination in order to understand the world, yet we must be cautious of its potent influence over our understanding. We must remain rooted in objective reality,—we must adhere to the text, which alone guides our understanding. We must look at our lives as simply pregnant with potentiality for meaning, and not assign our lives to what our imaginations have bequeathed us. We must understand that a true sense of the world always lies outside of our conception of it.

This work has been an effort to synthesize a theory of mind from the writings of Henry David Thoreau. His project at Walden Pond was a poetical exercise of coming to terms with the objects of the world. His time of solitude grounds his understanding of the world in a more natural setting than nineteenth century American society could provide. As he tells us in *Walden's* perhaps most famous passage, “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived” (*Walden* 394). In the setting of Nature, Thoreau is able “front only the essential facts of life,” facts that his life in society has obstructed. He seeks revelation in the woods, not through any divine message, but through an eventual correspondence between his mind and Nature's. The purity he sees in Nature must eventually reveal some sense of purity in himself.

But Thoreau ardently protests against a life engulfed in Nature. He must not become a specimen of the natural world that he devotes himself to observe and study. He, above all else, is interested in keeping separate from Nature, all the while living within it, in order that he keep

himself awake. “To be awake is to be alive”: he must keep a conscious relation to the world, and, thus, establish a conscious relation to himself (394). This conscious relation to the self requires a devotion to self-criticism, that oftentimes appears to the reader too harsh a stance towards life; yet this is at the heart of the relation he wishes to garner towards himself. He is quite serious when he professes that “[o]ur whole life is startlingly moral” (496); every little detail of his actions, of his habits and worldview is a dictate of his perception. He is extremely puritanical,—ascetic in his severity towards the self. But it is through this severity that he is able to establish a freedom that he has over his life. And with this freedom of the self, there must be a corresponding responsibility to the self.

But what is this responsibility? What exactly are the implications of our lives being “startlingly moral”? What this present work has not addressed, though I must profess has been a driving concern in writing this project, is Thoreau’s work ethic: his artistry as a writer. Thoreau does not discuss writing in too much detail in *Walden*, except for on the first page, where he “requires” of every writer “a simple and sincere account of his own life...for if he has lived sincerely, it must have been a distant land to me” (325). “Simplicity” and “sincerity,” as we can see from reading *Walden*, are extremely hard things to attain: it is the refined craft of artistry, to filter the world through our senses into a written account, which, if it is a simple and sincere account, shall be alien to all others. Thoreau is in search of a pure personality, a true voice that he can call his own and him alone. His solitude is meant to bring himself in relation to himself, to refine his self. And this voice can only be accessed through his confrontation with objective reality.

This is not to say that his time at *Walden* was a success in this regard. The path towards selfhood is never attained: it may only be approached by a constancy of experimentation and a critical stance towards the self. His freedom in solitude must be contrasted by a self-ordained chastity of the spirit, in order that he keep a pure relation to the world and his self. This solitude in the woods can be easily read as an allegory of the writing process itself, or perhaps, more inclusively, the artistic process. His solitude garners a purity in his art, where it is meant to cater to no fad or institution, but to be simply an honest manifestation of personal expression. Here we have a major theme arise that is universal to the literature of the ages: the pursuit of the self. It is a theme which has permeated so many of the most beloved tales, legends, myths and novels. Thoreau's tale at Walden Pond is a continuation of this literary trope; but his tale is so special because he is at once its main character, its reader and its writer. Every action he makes in the book, every detail he accounts for, and every word he chooses constructs a conduct of life that contains all things as particular mirrors or vantage points to the self. Experience for him is revelatory in that it opens up a teaching towards the self: he is mirrored in all things and all things he has experienced are mirrored in him. All things are symbols of the self, but we must not be quick to define these symbols.

This self-referencing towards the end of self-actualization can, however, bring us towards ground that may become exceedingly amoral. It is a difficult task to keep our distance from a world of symbol, yet still allow the natural correspondence between it and our selves. Thoreau's time at Walden Pond, is in many ways, more dangerous than the uncaring reader would wish to imagine. What is at stake for him is monomania, the fate of Captain Ahab in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. It is this very thing that Thoreau must fiercely keep at bay so that he does not fall

into total insanity. His self criticism, though harsh at times, must be exercised incessantly so that he does not become controlled by vision of the self; that is, a vision of the self that has *attained* selfhood.

I would like to conclude this work with a small meditation on Thoreau and Ahab as characters of literature. *Walden* and *Moby Dick* were written within four years of each other, and their concerns, I would like argue, are extremely similar and archetypal to coming golden era of American letters. Thoreau and Ahab are both characters in pursuit of selfhood, whose object, they have come to understand, cannot be found in American society: they must place themselves outside of society. This solitude in the unbounded wild is the medium by which these two characters are enabled to approach the self, unobstructed by the terms of citizenship: Thoreau chooses his place in an unscathed plot of the woods; Ahab chooses the open sea. Though these landscapes are different on many levels, what is most important is that they are exterior to a society, with all of its customs, worries and concerns. These landscapes are mediums of an idealized vision of the American dream, of the pursuit of selfhood, hearkening back to the shiftiness of selfhood, which have ideologically defined American democracy, yet have also been the terms of so much strife in our political landscape. It is the ultimate freedom. And with this freedom, politics must indelibly involve itself, must make boundaries around the glorified pursuit of selfhood.

Thoreau and Ahab are characters who have placed themselves outside of the political realm of America. They go outside of society and, in doing so, create a commentary on the failure of the American Dream. In “The Quarter-Deck” scene of *Moby Dick*, we see Ahab speak before his crew, having just confessed the trajectory of the Pequod’s journey; in this scene he

marks the plight of the American citizen in his efforts to attain selfhood: “All visible objects, man, are but pasteboard masks. But in each event—in the living act, the undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still unreasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting to the wall” (Melville 140). The self, in many ways, always finds itself outside of the bounds of society. Ahab, like Thoreau, understands the terms of visible objects; mainly, that things are not as they appear. “If man will strike, strike through the mask.” The mask, to Ahab, is the obstruction from the truth, the sugarcoated falsity that the masses deem to be fact. He has come to understand a truth of society that Thoreau also taps into: that society aims to govern by this falsity, which threatens an individual’s grip over the self. Yet Ahab identifies his obstructed path towards self-hood as being inseparable from the binds of society. The binds are in fact much more primordial than society: they are a fact of human nature.

Society enforces binds upon individuals, in the same way that the human frame and its senses bind the individual. The truth ever eludes the seeker; but this is not because of society, but because of the self, who will trick itself into staying too ardently to that the truth or a truth sensed in singular things. This is exactly Ahab’s plight. He makes the white whale, the animal that emasculated him, “demasted” him, an object that mocks his inability to attain the truth. He formulates that with the death of Moby Dick, he shall attain his vision of self:

To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there’s naught beyond. But this enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale



principal, I will wreak that hate upon him. Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me. For could the sun do that, then could I do the other; since there is ever a sort of fair play herein, jealousy presiding over all creations. But not my master, man, is even that fair play. Who's over me? Truth hath no confines. (140)

Ahab's "jealousy" of the white whale has instilled a sense of justice in the natural world. He bases his notion on "fair play" between the elements, wherein he may participate. He personifies Nature, gives to it human sentiments, operating under some divine psychology that he forces his way into, striking through the wall. Through this ordering of the world, he makes the white whale a symbol of all things in the world antithetical to his sense of self. His entire sense of being becomes defined by this goal of selfhood, which is embodied in the life of the white whale.

The main point of contrast between Thoreau and Ahab is the belief in symbol. It is quite similar to the differences I have shown in the first chapter, between Thoreau and Rieff's formulation of the Therapeutic. Ahab, like the Therapeutic, has denied believing in the saving symbolic of American society. He detests the force that symbols have upon his relation to the world. His trauma sustained through his fateful first encounter with the white whale taught him that the truth cannot be found in society, but only by the forced will of the self. This, in many regards, is true. But in compensation for the lacking symbol in his life, Ahab composes his life around a self-defined symbol: the white whale itself. He has set his entire being down a set path, a course towards an idealized vision of selfhood, which requires the annihilation of the white whale as symbol. Even before his final battle with the whale, Ahab is nearly persuaded by his first mate Starbuck, who pleads, "Away! let us away!—this instant let me alter the course" (406).

Ahab has set himself down his path, picturing prophecies of his own success in the world around him. He has composed the world to fall under his symbol; that is, the symbol of his attainment of selfhood which is enshrouded in the life of Moby Dick. And in attempting to destroy the symbol, he destroys himself: Ahab's conception of the world becomes to defined by the forced order of his own symbology.

Thoreau's belief that "the universe constantly and obediently answers to our conceptions" is the fate that is Ahab. He dwells to near to his conception of the universe and from hence forward all of the universe is subordinated to his conception. Thoreau's belief both champions the power of the imagination, but it is equally a warning to all people. "...the track is laid for us," he says, "[l]et us spend our lives in conceiving then" (*Walden* 399). The power of symbol is that it never inheres in a single object, but orients an individual's entire understanding of the world. Thoreau's advice to his readers is to constantly be aware of these symbols that we might crowd near us. We must be freed from these symbols, from their powers over our belief, in order that we may accept them in our dwelling. Symbols, themselves, will never die: they are etched into the fabric of our lives, manifesting themselves in literature, the arts, religions, social institutions. They are a part of humanity.

As Thoreau learns from his experience at the Burnt Lands in "Ktaadn," the human mind can only conceive in form, never in chaos. Though the human mind will set itself down the path of its own conceiving, we must accept the chaos of all things. Truth is what we make of this chaos, what can be proved in a formed and succinct manner. Thoreau's writings serve to aid our understanding of the chaos that experience is composed of, as a means of honing in on our

conceptions. This returns us to the point of Thoreau's stay at Walden Pond: the writing process. He contains his conceptions of the universe in his writing, while he spends his day conceiving. He, unlike Ahab, allows reality to refine his sense of self, not demanding that reality obey his conceived vision of selfhood.

Ahab and Thoreau are an interesting comparison because of the fine line that divides them. There is much in Ahab that represents the sad fate of purported democracy, which is fascism. By arranging the world to fit a dictated symbology, Ahab reigns in the members of the Pequod to follow his vision. His crew members lose their individuality by his demands of symbolic order, falling under the rule of totalitarianism. Thoreau on the other hand, requires that every individual have a dialectic relation to the world, for the very purpose that this totalitarian symbology does not come into being. He creates a individualized order of checks and balances, mirrored in an idealized democracy. By keeping his symbology, his conception of the universe, as idea, he may enter life as rife with meaning, which does not instantly acquiesce to an individual's imagination.

It is now appropriate to address the title of this project, which is quoted from a passage at the end of *Walden*. "If you have built your castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them" (580). Our castles, our constructions of meaning, are merely air. They are not literally manifested in the world, but are the projections of the mind's yearning towards order. But because these castles are in the ether does not insist their unreality. This quote sums up the entirety of Thoreau's theory of mind, at least in its ethical practicality; our conceptions should never be denied, but "simply" understood as outside of reality. But this should not restrict their descent from the ether: they may still be our writing.

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